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SUBJECT: BYZANTINE POLITICS THRIVE IN SOVIET GEORGIA

REF: MOSCOW 10336

11. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY

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12. DURING A MARCH 31 - APRIL 3 TRIP TO TBILISI, POLOFF MET WITH GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET CHAIRMAN ZVIAD GAMSAKHURDIA (PROTECT), OPPOSITION LEADERS, AND OTHER REPUBLIC RESIDENTS TO SORT OUT THE BYZANTINE POLITICS OF GEORGIA WHERE ACCUSATIONS FLY FREELY, ENEMIES ARE MADE EASILY, AND VIOLENT CONFRONTATION OCCURS DAILY. DURING THE PAST MONTH GAMSAKHURDIA HAS MOVED TO CONCENTRATE MOST REPUBLIC POWERS IN HIS HANDS THROUGH THE CREATION OF A PREFECTURE SYSTEM AND A REPUBLIC PRESIDENCY. GAMSAKHURDIA INSISTS THAT SUCH STEPS ARE NECESSARY BECAUSE THE CENTER IS WORKING WITH HIS ENEMIES -- THE NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE SOUTH OSSETIANS -- TO UNDERMINE HIS GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. OPPOSITION LEADERS FROM THE NATIONAL CONGRESS ACCUSE GAMSAKHURDIA OF DEPRIVING THEM OF THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS AND WORKING WITH THE CENTER AGAINST THE GEORGIAN PEOPLE. VIRTUALLY ALL SIDES CLAIM THE OTHER SIDES ARE IN CAHOOTS WITH THE KGB. IN ADDITION, EACH SIDE, INCLUDING GAMSAKHURDIA'S ROUND TABLE, HAS ITS OWN PARAMILITARY GROUP OR GROUPS WHICH LAUNCH FREQUENT ATTACKS AGAINST EACH OTHER. END SUMMARY.

13. THIS IS THE SECOND IN A SERIES OF THREE CABLES ON POLITICS IN SOVIET GEORGIA. THIS FIRST REPORT (REF) DEALT WITH GAMSAKHURDIA'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE CENTER AND THE SOUTH OSSETIANS. THE THIRD WILL COVER A TRIP POLOFF MADE TO A KGB PRISON AND A CONVERSATION WITH THE IMPRISONED OSSETIAN LEADER KULUMBEGOV'S LAWYER.

GEORGIAN POLITICS: ETERNAL PLOTS AND COUNTER-PLOTS

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14. GEORGIAN POLITICS REMAIN TRUE TO THEIR BYZANTINE HERITAGE AND APPEAR SOMEWHAT BIZARRE TO MOST OUTSIDERS. MOST OF THE RELATIVELY SMALL REPUBLIC'S LEADERS HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE CHILDHOOD AND HAVE BUILT AN INTRICATE WEB OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES THROUGH THE YEARS. GEORGIAN POLITICS ARE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL AND LOGIC IS OFTEN CAST ASIDE IN FAVOR OF INFLAMMATORY RHETORIC AND HIGH DRAMA. ACCUSATIONS OF KGB MEMBERSHIP, BETRAYAL, COLLUSION WITH MOSCOW, AND CLINICAL INSANITY ARE TRADED WITH EQUAL VENOM FROM ALL SIDES. THE STORIES BECOME ENHANCED WITH TIME AND QUICKLY TAKE THEIR PLACES IN THE TWISTED AND BEWILDERING LORE OF GEORGIAN POLITICAL HISTORY. POLOFF HAS VISITED THE REPUBLIC FREQUENTLY DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS AND OCCASIONALLY DURING THE PAST DECADE AND HAS NEVER FAILED TO BE INTRIGUED BY THE PECULIAR BRAND OF POLITICS GEORGIANS PRACTICE.

15. VENDETTAS, PARTICULARLY IN RETALIATION FOR PUBLIC CRITICISM, ARE QUITE COMMON IN GEORGIA. GEORGIANS ARE QUICK TO TAKE UMBRAGE AND TURN ON ANY CRITICAL PARTIES. THIS COMBINED WITH THE GEORGIAN FLARE FOR

DRAMA AND HYPERBOLE SOMETIMES LEAD TO RATHER STARTLING ACCUSATIONS. GEORGIAN POLITICAL LEADERS, ESPECIALLY GAMSAKHURDIA, HAVE TRIED TO APPLY THESE TACTICS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD WITH DISASTROUS PUBLIC RELATIONS RESULTS. GAMSAKHURDIA, FOR EXAMPLE, RECENTLY LABELLED RADIO LIBERTY AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL "INSTRUMENTS OF THE KREMLIN" BECAUSE THEY CRITICIZED HIM. WHEN POLOFF POINTED OUT THAT THIS WAS NOT EVIDENCE OF COLLUSION WITH THE KREMLIN, GAMSAKHURDIA APPEARED SURPRISED. GAMSAKHURDIA ALSO HAS MADE MANY OUTRAGEOUS CLAIMS AGAINST HIS MAJOR OPPOSITION, THE NATIONAL CONGRESS. THESE CLAIMS INCLUDE BEARING OR FATHERING ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN, COLLUSION WITH IRAQ IN THE GULF WAR, AND OTHER APOCRYPHAL ACCUSATIONS.

¶6. THE OPPOSITION REACTS IN MUCH THE SAME WAY. NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADER GHIA CHANTURIA (PROTECT) HAD EQUALLY OUTRAGEOUS STORIES ABOUT HOW GAMSAKHURDIA WAS ACTUALLY COLLUDING WITH THE CENTER, PARTICULARLY THE KGB, AGAINST THE GEORGIAN PEOPLE. IN ADDITION, CHANTURIA AND HIS WIFE AND FELLOW POLITICAL ACTIVIST, IRINA SARISHVILI (PROTECT), WHO WERE ONCE FELLOW DISSIDENTS WITH GAMSAKHURDIA, SHOWED POLOFF ALLEGED OFFICIAL PROOF OF GAMSAKHURDIA'S INSANITY. THE "PROOF" CONSISTED OF A "SECRET" CERTIFICATE FROM A PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC WHERE GAMSAKHURDIA WAS CONFINED WHEN HE WAS A POLITICAL PRISONER. WHEN POLOFF ASKED WHERE THEY HAD OBTAINED THESE AND OTHER DOCUMENTS, CHANTURIA REPLIED THAT FORMER KGB MEMBERS HAD PASSED THE DOCUMENTS TO THEM IN FRANCE LAST YEAR.

¶7. LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES ARE BURIED IN EACH SIDE'S LITANY OF ACCUSATIONS AND COMPLAINTS. GREAT EFFORT AND MUCH PATIENCE, HOWEVER, IS REQUIRED TO MINE THESE NUGGETS OF TRUTH FROM THE TANGLED TERRAIN OF GEORGIAN POLITICS. CONSISTENCY IS NOT A HIGHLY REGARDED VIRTUE WHEN IT COMES TO STATISTICS AND AN INTERVIEWER WILL OFTEN RECEIVE WILDLY FLUCTUATING ESTIMATES FROM THE SAME PERSON IN THE COURSE OF A SINGLE DAY. FOR EXAMPLE, GAMSAKHURDIA ESTIMATED THE NUMBER OF GEORGIAN MVD PERSONNEL AT 10,000 ONE MORNING AND 20,000 LATER THAT DAY. NATIONAL CONGRESS LEADERS EXHIBITED THE SAME CAVALIER ATTITUDE TOWARD STATISTICS BY CHANGING THEIR ESTIMATES OF MEMBERSHIP BY SEVERAL THOUSAND ON EACH OF THE THREE OCCASIONS POLOFF SPOKE TO THEM DURING THE TRIP.

SPRINGTIME FOR GAMSAKHURDIA
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¶8. ON APRIL 14, GAMSAKHURDIA HELD AN EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT, WHICH CREATED A REPUBLIC PRESIDENCY WITH SWEEPING POWERS AND UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED GAMSAKHURDIA PRESIDENT UNTIL REPUBLIC-WIDE ELECTIONS ON MAY 26. DURING A TELEPHONE CONVERSATION THAT SAME DAY, GAMSAKHURDIA TOLD POLOFF THAT HE REQUIRED SUCH POWERS TO BRING ORDER TO THE REPUBLIC AND ROUT THE CENTER'S ACCOMPLICES. THROUGH THE CREATION OF THE PRESIDENCY, GAMSAKHURDIA HAS GAINED VIRTUALLY UNRESTRAINED POWER. ALTHOUGH THE REPUBLIC LAW ON THE PRESIDENCY STIPULATES THAT THREE-QUARTERS OF THE PARLIAMENT CAN IMPEACH HIM AT ANY TIME, GAMSAKHURDIA HAS THE PRESENT GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET FIRMLY UNDER HIS CONTROL.

¶9. GAMSAKHURDIA WILL PROBABLY WIN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ON MAY 26. HE PROBABLY SET AN EARLY DATE FOR THE ELECTIONS SO THAT THE FRAGMENTED OPPOSITION WOULD NOT HAVE TIME TO PREPARE AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN. WHILE GAMSAKHURDIA CERTAINLY HAS AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCIES, HE IS ALSO QUITE POPULAR -- AS EVEN HIS RIVALS WILL ADMIT. HE IS STILL ABLE TO DRAW LARGE CROWDS AND GEORGIANS, WHO ARE QUITE NATIONALISTIC, REVERE HIM FOR HIS MANY YEARS AS A POLITICAL DISSIDENT AND HIS STRONG CHALLENGES TO THE CENTER. HIS MARCH 31 REFERENDUM ON GEORGIAN INDEPENDENCE WAS

A RESOUNDING SUCCESS AS EVEN THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS PARTICIPATED AND VOTED IN FAVOR OF REPUBLIC INDEPENDENCE. ONE OF THE POSTERS URGING REPUBLIC CITIZENS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REFERENDUM BORE A PHOTOGRAPH OF GAMSAKHURDIA EXTENDING HIS ARM FORWARD IN A CLENCHED FIST AS A SIGN OF DEFIANCE AGAINST THE CENTER. THE GESTURE BORE A CHILLING RESEMBLANCE TO THE NAZI SALUTE -- A FACT THAT DID NOT ESCAPE HIS DETRACTORS BUT EVIDENTLY DID GAMSAKHURDIA NO HARM.

¶10. ONE OF GAMSAKHURDIA'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL POLICIES HAS BEEN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES CALLED PREFECTURES. ACCORDING TO THIS SYSTEM, GAMSAKHURDIA APPOINTS PREFECTS WHO ADMINISTER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PLACE OF THE SOVIETS OR COUNCILS OF THE FORMER SYSTEM. GAMSAKHURDIA SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE APPOINTED THE FIRST GROUP OF PREFECTS IN JANUARY, HE HOPED THAT BY NEXT YEAR THEY WOULD BE ELECTED. HE CLAIMED THAT SOME OF THESE ELECTIONS WERE HELD AT THE SAME TIME AS THE MARCH 31 GEORGIAN REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE. ACCORDING TO THE APRIL 14 LAW ON THE PRESIDENCY, HOWEVER, THE GEORGIAN PRESIDENT WILL HAVE THE POWER TO APPOINT AND REMOVE PREFECTS. GAMSAKHURDIA SAID HE WOULD TRY THE SYSTEM FOR SIX MONTHS AND "IF THE PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE IT, WE WILL GET RID OF IT." GAMSAKHURDIA COMPARED THIS SYSTEM TO THE FRENCH AND ITALIAN GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS, WHICH HE SAID HE USED AS EXAMPLES TO CREATE THE PREFECTURES. CRITICS HAVE ACCUSED GAMSAKHURDIA OF SETTING UP A NON-DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM BY APPOINTING PREFECTS TO CIRCUMVENT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ESPECIALLY IN AREAS CONTROLLED BY THE NATIONAL CONGRESS.

¶11. GAMSAKHURDIA PLANS TO CONTINUE HIS PUSH FOR "THE RENEWAL OF GEORGIA'S INDEPENDENCE BASED ON THE 1918 GEORGIAN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE." HE SAID HE UNDERSTANDS THAT THIS IS A GRADUAL BUT INEVITABLE PROCESS. ON APRIL 9, THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE TRAGIC GEORGIAN DEATHS AT THE HANDS OF SOVIET TROOPS, THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET OFFICIALLY DECLARED ITS INTENTION TO RENEW ITS INDEPENDENCE BASED ON THE 1918 DECLARATION JUST AS GAMSAKHURDIA HAD PLANNED.

DOUBLE-SPEAK ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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¶12. DURING POLOFF'S VISIT, GAMSAKHURDIA CONTINUED TO JUSTIFY HIS SUPPRESSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, SUCH AS FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND SPEECH, AS "NECESSARY MEASURES" TO FIGHT THE CENTER'S "PROVOCATION." AT OTHER TIMES, HE GAVE POLOFF OBVIOUSLY TRANSPARENT EXCUSES. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN POLOFF ASKED WHY HE HAD CLOSED DOWN "MOLODEZH GRUZII," A NEWSPAPER CRITICAL OF THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT, GAMSAKHURDIA SAID THAT GEORGIA WAS EXPERIENCING A PAPER SHORTAGE AND "THEREFORE, UNFORTUNATELY SOME OF THE NEWSPAPERS HAD TO BE SHUT DOWN."

¶13. GAMSAKHURDIA INSISTED THAT HE WOULD ALLOW CRITICISM OF HIMSELF AND HIS GOVERNMENT IN THE PRESS, "BUT NOT SLANDER." HIS DEFINITION OF "SLANDER" SEEMED EXCESSIVELY WIDE-RANGING. HE CLAIMED THAT CHANTURIA HAD WANTED TO PRINT ARTICLES "WITH OBSCENE WORDS IN THEM AND OF COURSE, WE CANNOT ALLOW SUCH THINGS." IN REALITY, CHANTURIA HAD TRIED TO PRINT AN ARTICLE CRITICAL OF GAMSAKHURDIA IN THE REPUBLIC NEWSPAPER AND THE EDITOR WAS NOT ALLOWED TO PRINT IT. GAMSAKHURDIA ALSO SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE POLITICAL GROUPS OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO PUBLISH OR SAY WHATEVER THEY WANTED "BECAUSE THEY WOULD JUST PROVOKE VIOLENCE."

¶14. DURING THE LAST WEEK IN MARCH, THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET PASSED A RESOLUTION BANNING DEMONSTRATIONS IN FRONT OF THE GEORGIAN SUPREME

SOVIET BUILDING. INTERESTINGLY, THIS IS WHERE GAMSAKHURDIA HIMSELF HELD MANY LARGE RALLIES LAST YEAR. CHANTURIA TOLD POLOFF THAT THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY GAMSAKHURDIA'S PLOY TO LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF DIRECT POLITICAL CRITICISM OF GAMSAKHURDIA IN ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR GATHERING PLACES IN THE CITY. GAMSAKHURDIA TOLD POLOFF THAT HE HAD DECIDED TO BAN THE DEMONSTRATIONS ON THE BUILDING'S GROUNDS BECAUSE THE DEMONSTRATIONS "BLOCKED MY EXIT FROM THE BUILDING AND I COULD NOT GO HOME BECAUSE I WAS TRAPPED. THEY ARE FREE TO DEMONSTRATE ANYWHERE ELSE."

THE UNDERDOG OPPOSITION TRIES TO FIGHT BACK
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¶15. THE MAJOR OPPOSITION, THE NATIONAL CONGRESS, CONSISTS OF SIX BLOCKS OF ORGANIZATIONS WITH AN AVERAGE OF TEN PARTIES IN EACH BLOCK. MANY OF THESE PARTIES HAVE ONLY A COUPLE HUNDRED MEMBERS. THE LARGEST PARTIES ARE THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, WHICH HAS ABOUT 5000 MEMBERS, AND THE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE PARTY, WHICH HAS ABOUT 2000 MEMBERS. THE NATIONAL CONGRESS HAS A MORE RADICAL APPROACH TO ACHIEVING INDEPENDENCE THAN GAMSAKHURDIA'S ROUND TABLE. THEY BELIEVE THAT GAMSAKHURDIA SHOULD TAKE AN EVEN MORE CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH TO THE CENTER. FOR EXAMPLE, DAVID ONANASHVILI (PROTECT), NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE PARTY ACTIVIST, TOLD POLOFF THAT HIS BLOCK OF PARTIES HAD BEEN HOLDING DEMONSTRATIONS TO GET THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET TO BAN THE PRESENCE OF ALL SOVIET TROOPS IN GEORGIA. WHILE ITS MEMBERS AGREE ON THE NEED TO ACCELERATE THE INDEPENDENCE PROCESS, THEY DISAGREE ON WHAT KINDS OF TACTICS TO USE. NOW THAT THE REPUBLIC IS PREPARING TO HOLD PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AS EARLY AS MAY 26, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE OVER 60 PARTIES WILL BE ABLE TO SETTLE ON A CANDIDATE AND MOUNT AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN TO CHALLENGE GAMSAKHURDIA'S BID FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

¶16. NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADER GHIA CHANTURIA TOLD POLOFF THAT IT WAS MUCH HARDER FOR THE NATIONAL CONGRESS TO FIGHT AGAINST THE ROUND TABLE THAN IT WAS FOR THEM TO STRUGGLE AGAINST THE COMMUNIST PARTY BECAUSE THE ROUND TABLE IS GEORGIAN. CHANTURIA AND OTHERS ADMITTED THAT THEIR SUPPORT AND NUMBERS HAD DWINDLED. INDEED, POLOFF NOTICED THAT THE TWO DEMONSTRATIONS SHE ATTENDED WERE MUCH SMALLER THAN PREVIOUS NATIONAL CONGRESS DEMONSTRATIONS LAST YEAR. EVEN THEN, HOWEVER, NATIONAL CONGRESS GATHERINGS TENDED TO BE SMALLER THAN ROUND TABLE RALLIES.

¶17. THE NATIONAL CONGRESS GROUPS FEAR GAMSAKHURDIA AND HAVE LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES ABOUT LACK OF ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND VIOLATIONS OF THEIR FREEDOM OF SPEECH. CHANTURIA TOLD POLOFF THAT GAMSAKHURDIA HAD WARNED IN A PUBLIC SPEECH THAT HE WOULD "PHYSICALLY DESTROY" THEM. HE ALSO SAID THAT GAMSAKHURDIA HAD PREVENTED THEM FROM GETTING HARD CURRENCY TO PAY FOR A TRIP THEY PLANNED TO MAKE TO THE U.S. IRINA SARISHVILI TOLD POLOFF THAT SHE WAS AFRAID THAT GAMSAKHURDIA WAS PREPARING TO HAVE HER ARRESTED BECAUSE SHE WROTE ARTICLES AND MADE SPEECHES CRITICAL OF HIS GOVERNMENT.

¶18. SARISHVILI CALLED GAMSAKHURDIA "A CRUEL MAN" AND TOLD POLOFF THAT GAMSAKHURDIA HAD FABRICATED MANY ACCUSATIONS AGAINST HER ABOUT COLLABORATING WITH IRAQ AND HAVING SEVERAL ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN IN ORPHANAGES. CHANTURIA SAID THAT WHEN THEY TRIED TO CHALLENGE GAMSAKHURDIA TO A DEBATE ON TELEVISION, GAMSAKHURDIA REFUSED AND WOULD NOT ALLOW THEM TO EVEN PRESENT THEIR VIEWS.

¶19. INTERESTINGLY, GAMSAKHURDIA AND CHANTURIA HAD BEEN FELLOW GEORGIAN DISSIDENTS AT ONE TIME AND HAD WORKED TOGETHER AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS. ALTHOUGH THEY NOW CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN CLOSE,

POLOFF CLEARLY REMEMBERS BOTH MEN SINGING EACH OTHER'S PRAISES SEVEN YEARS AGO.

PARAMILITARY GROUPS WAGE POLITICAL BATTLES

120. ACCORDING TO MOST ESTIMATES, ABOUT 25 PARAMILITARY GROUPS FUNCTION IN GEORGIA. ABOUT HALF OF THESE ALLEGEDLY BELONG TO POLITICAL GROUPS LOYAL TO GAMSAKHURDIA'S ROUND TABLE AND THE OTHER HALF BELONG TO POLITICAL GROUPS LOYAL TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, GAMSAKHURDIA HAS ATTEMPTED TO DISARM THE NATIONAL CONGRESS' PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND TRIED TO SLOWLY INCORPORATE HIS GROUPS INTO THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL GUARD. THESE TROOPS IN GREEN FATIGUES AND BURGUNDY BERETS ARE MOST VISIBLE AROUND THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET BUILDING AND AT THE AIRPORT. A WESTERN JOURNALIST TOLD POLOFF THREE MONTHS AGO THAT ACCORDING TO A SOVIET MILITARY GENERAL IN GEORGIA, GAMSAKHURDIA HAD TRIED TO MAKE A DEAL WITH THE SOVIET ARMY TO DISARM THE NATIONAL CONGRESS' GROUP IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME COOPERATION ON DRAFTING YOUNG GEORGIANS INTO THE ARMY.

121. GAMSAKHURDIA HAS FOCUSED PARTICULARLY ON DISBANDING THE MKHEDRIONI GROUP SOMETIMES KNOWN AS "THE HORSEMEN" OR THE "KNIGHTS OF MKHEDRIONI." INTERESTINGLY, THE MKHEDRIONI WAS FORMED BY BOTH GAMSAKHURDIA'S ROUND TABLE AND GROUPS PRESENTLY BELONGING TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS DURING THE SUMMER OF 1989 TO PROTECT GEORGIANS DURING CONFLICTS WITH THE ABKHAZS AND THE AZERBAIDZHANIS. AFTER THE ROUND TABLE AND THE NATIONAL CONGRESS GROUPS SPLIT, THE MKHEDRIONI THREW THEIR SUPPORT TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS.

122. THE MKHEDRIONI LEADER, JOSELIANI, WAS RECENTLY ARRESTED WITH ABOUT 70 OTHER MKHEDRIONI MEMBERS AND HAS BEEN AWAITING TRIAL ON CHARGES OF ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF WEAPONS. JOSELIANI'S SUPPORTERS ADMIT THAT HE HAS SERVED FOUR PRISON SENTENCES FOR ARMED ROBBERY AND THAT PRIOR TO HIS MOST RECENT ARREST, HE HAD NOT BEEN A POLITICAL PRISONER. NATIONAL CONGRESS MEMBER IRINA SARIASHVILI TOLD POLOFF, "WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HE HAS BEEN A CRIMINAL SO IT IS NOT A PROBLEM. HE DOES NOT HIDE IT. GAMSAKHURDIA UNJUSTLY ARRESTED HIM ON CHARGES OF ILLEGALLY POSSESSING WEAPONS. OF COURSE, HE HAD THOSE WEAPONS, BUT IF YOU USE THAT CRITERIA YOU COULD IMPRISON EVERYONE WHO LIVES IN GEORGIA." INTERESTINGLY, GEORGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIAL LEVON GOGOBERIDZE (PROTECT) DEFENDED JOSELIANI'S CHARACTER BY POINTING OUT THAT HE WAS CLEVER ENOUGH TO GET INTO MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY AFTER OBTAINING ONLY A SEVENTH GRADE EDUCATION. HE ALSO TOLD POLOFF THAT MANY GEORGIANS THOUGHT OF JOSELIANI AS AN INTELLECTUAL.

123. ALTHOUGH GAMSAKHURDIA MAINTAINS THAT ALL THE PARAMILITARY GROUPS LOYAL TO THE ROUND TABLE HAVE BEEN DISBANDED, POLOFF SAW AND HEARD ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT AT LEAST SOME OF THESE GROUPS WERE STILL ACTIVE. IN AREAS OUTSIDE TBILISI, ARMED GROUPS FROM THE MERAB KOSTAVA SOCIETY, THE LEAGUE OF GEORGIAN EAGLES, THE WHITE KNIGHTS OF GEORGIA (ROUNDTABLE SPINOFF FROM THE MKHEDRIONI), AND THE ILYA THE RIGHTEOUS SOCIETY HAVE BATTLED THE NUMEROUS PARAMILITARY GROUPS OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS. ACCORDING TO DAVID ONANASHVILI (PROTECT), A NATIONAL CONGRESS ACTIVIST, MOST OF THE MORE THAN 20 GROUPS IN THE NATIONAL CONGRESS HAVE THEIR OWN PARAMILITARY GROUPS.

124. LENINGRAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.